

## An Open Letter for all Victorian Nurses

Dear Colleagues and friends,

***Firstly, I want to thank every nurse and midwife for your service and sacrifice during these difficult times.***

Over the past few weeks, I have been contacted by many nurses in Victoria, all working in varying and extreme conditions. The Australian College of Nursing conducted a survey last week to connect with all nurses and hear any concerns; we were overwhelmed with 1500 responses in just 48 hours.

Many more concerns and comments continue to stream in daily. Whilst these are being collated to give us a better understanding of the action and advocacy we need to take, **I want you to know we hear you, we are here for you, and you are not alone.**

**I want all Australians to know** that each of you, as nurses, choose to turn up and deliver care to keep Victorians safe. Throughout our history of war, famine, fire, floods and now a pandemic, nurses have selflessly sacrificed, with nobility and humility. As economies crumble and familiarity fades nurses find courage and conviction to fulfil our professional responsibilities.

Right now, there will be a nurse who:

- Left their children and loved ones to care for yours
- Puts their own basic needs of hydration and toileting on hold to tend to your relative's needs
- Feels the pain and restriction of working 8-12+ hours in PPE
- Is isolating to keep you safe and waiting for results to go back to work to care
- Wears the brunt of your frustration and fear when they are spoken to rudely or treated unfairly
- Contracted the coronavirus because of community contact
- Wants each person to follow the rules so they do not have to treat you as their patient
- Is feeling like they cannot do enough, and this will never end
- Is scared but still turns up
- Sheds a tear, quietly contemplating how to find the strength to face the next day while providing comfort and reassurance to those whom they are caring for
- Puts their own health needs as secondary to yours

**It is time all Victorians understand what nurses need the community to do – to protect themselves, follow the rules and to keep safe.**

**The Australian College of Nursing stands with all nurses and midwives, either working on the frontline or in management, across the public, private and aged-care sectors. Your work is critical and valued and we appreciate everything you do.**

Nurses have told us they are tired, worried and weary and we need to act regarding:

- Being able to access appropriate and safe PPE
- The real issues with wearing PPE all day
- Finding solutions so nurses don't have to wear uniforms home
- A safe place to share your concerns and unload the mental burden with someone skilled for frontline workers
- Excessive paperwork and bureaucracy. You want those at the top to listen and support you, rather than control and command you ... or worse, ignore you
- Educating people so they stop judging us if we get the virus; we live in the community and are at risk like everyone else.

There will be more action needed as we gather your thoughts and ideas. We recognise the sacrifices you are making. And we are working hard in the background to make things better.

We are here for the long game; but it will take time to recover and emerge as a new nation, with new ways of working and new ways of being.

The Australian College of Nursing is in the final stages of compiling a national COVID-19 strategy response that will aim to address the professional issues nurses are facing across the system – for our members and non-members. This strategy will focus on information, upskilling, advocacy, support for nurses, health system reforms for professional practice and community awareness.

**I want you to know it is okay to need help and support. I ask that you take the time to express your needs, seek support, and take a moment to care for yourself. Guilt free.**

Please feel free to join our [NURSE STRONG group](#) on Facebook and reach out to your colleagues and friends in our amazing profession.

It is not the **Year of the Nurse and Year of the Midwife** we expected, but our country and our people need us and ultimately, it is why the World Health Organization acknowledged us to be celebrated this year. I promise when this is all over the Australian College of Nursing will make sure we get our time to celebrate together.

Thank you for all that you are doing, you matter.

Stay strong and safe.

Sincerely,



**Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward RN FACN**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Australian College of Nursing  
7 August 2020